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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a 1991 research study that examined non-English speaking background (NESB) women in Victoria, Australia. The women had past or current experience of paid work or were intending to participate in paid work, and they were taking or intending to take literacy and basic education courses. Some of the relationships between the two groups of factors are explored. It is noted that if Australia's workers are to take advantage of the education and training opportunities offered by government-endorsed restructuring in support of a national multicultural policy, then factors such as literacy level, competence in English, and gender are important considerations. The general conclusion of this study is that NESB women tend to be "losers" in the drive for literacy, but that there is ample potential for transforming them into "winners." Serious issues raised by the study include the following: (1) the philosophy underlying "multicultural" Australia, and particularly the national languages policy, may be only a political slogan if NESB women's literacy and general education needs are not given priority; (2) literacy and skills training problems cannot be solved without taking into account the complexity of language and literacy, the clientele to be accommodated, and the position and status of women in Australian society; and (3) assumptions about NESB women as primarily "victims" are severely limited and may transform NESB women from winners to losers while paradoxically enabling others to move from being losers to winners. (LB) Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education

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THE DRIVE FOR LITERACY : ARE NESB WOMEN WINNERS OR LOSERS?

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

A paper presented at the National Conference of the Australian Association for Adult and Community Education (AAACE) held at Melbourne University, December 2-5 1991

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary multicultural policy is based on three elements. They are respect for cultural difference, promotion of social justice and economic efficiency. In an overt drive to boost the last of these, the Hawke government has promoted the concept of industry and award restructuring. It is clear that if workers are to take advantage of the education and training opportunities offered by restructuring, factors such as literacy level,competence in English and gender are as important as age, labour force and occupational status and present level of specific job-related skills, although the former may attract less attention than the latter. The paper is based on a 1991 research study of non-English speaking background (NESB) women in Victoria, with past or current experience of paid work or intending to participate in paid work, and those not in paid work, who were undertaking (or might intend to undertake) literacy and basic education courses. The paper explores some of the relationships between the two groups of factors noted above. The general conclusion is that NESB women tend to be 'losers' in the drive for literacy, but there is ample potential for transforming them into 'winners'.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAACE Australian Association for Adult and Community Education
ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics
AGPS Australian Government Publishing Service
AMEP Adult Migrant English Program
AMES Adult Migrant Education Services
BIR Bureau of Immigration Research
DFE Division of Further Education
DILGEA Department of Immigration ,Local Government and Ethnic Affairs
ECC Ethnic Communities Council
ESB English Speaking Background
ESL English as a Second Languge
HR House of Representatives
LOTE Language(s) Other Than English
MRS Migrant Resource Centre
NESB Non English Speaking Background
OMA Office of Multicultural Affairs
STB State Training Board
WEN Women's Ethnic Network
WICH Women in Industry : Contraception and Health
WIRE Women's Information and Referral Exchange
TAFE Technical and Further Education

INTRODUCTION

The topic for this paper, and indeed the theme of the conference, is of particular significance in the Australia of the 1990s. There are many reasons to support this assertion. We shall merely point to selected features of contemporary Australian society which provide indications why this should be so.

(i) Australia's status as a 'multicultural' nation

Even if one were referring only to the facts of demography, Australia's multiculturalism is beyond doubt. The productive and reproductive contribution of women, and especially those of non-English speaking background (NESB) in this society is also beyond doubt. For example, of Australia's total population of just over 17 million in 1991, about 22.5 per cent are overseas born (BIR, 1991,p.xii) ; immigration's contribution to population growth in 1988/89 was 55 per cent compared with 32 per cent in 1971/72 ; as a percentage of the population, Asian, Middle East and Oceanian birthplace groups are increasing as the longer established European birthplace groups decline (DILGEA, 1991, p.19) ; and in terms of labour force participation, at August 1991, the proportions were 54 per cent Australian born females, 49 per cent overseas born females (55 per cent English-speaking background or ESB and 45 per cent NESB), 76 per cent Australian born males and 73 per cent overseas born males (76 per cent ESB and 70 per cent NESB). Overall the male labour force participation rate was 75.1 percent compared with a female rate of 52.6 per cent (ABS, 1991) . These few statistics illustrate the diversity of Australia's population, the importance of migration and the rapidity of increase of women's participation in paid work, especially of the overseas born.

(ii) Recognition of Australia's ethnic and cultural diversity

This received offical expression and legitimacy in 1989 with the launching of the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* by the Hawke Government, which replaced the earlier policy, encapsulated in the *Galbally Report* (1978) and implemented by the Fraser Government. A distinctive feature of the Hawke government's definition of multiculturalism has been the inclusion, among the three major dimensions, of the economic strand. This is described as (OMA, 1990, p.69):

> Economic efficiency: the need to maintain, develop and use effectively the skills and talents of all Australians, regardless of background.

The ideology of economic rationality has become a hallmark of the Hawke government, featuring not only in multiculturalism policy but policies concerned also with industry restructuring, (un)employment, education at both the school and higher education levels and even language policy, including development of English and languages other than English (LOTE) resources within Australia and the export of English language training overseas.

(iii) The promotion of social justice

In the context of a period of recession, government concern for social justice has become more salient. For example, in the words of the Social Justice Consultative Council for Victoria (1991, p.1)

> With more people disadvantaged in our society, social justice and its permanent incorporation in mainstream policies and programs, is more important now than at any other time...

Yet, markedly in Victoria, the recession appears to be biting more savagely as reflected in unemployment, collapse of small business, and the heightened pressures on women especially in families to maintain the viability of family structure and functions. There is evidence that NESB migrants, including women, are being disproportionately affected by economic hard times, especially with the continuing decline of the manufacturing industry (Foster et al, 1991; BIR, work-in-progress,1991-2, interview with consultant). These events inevitably give rise to questioning of the basis in reality of concepts like social justice and their use as mere rhetorical devices or slogans.

(iv) NESB women - a vulnerable group

There is ample evidence from a range of reports, conferences and speakouts (see Bibliography, Foster and Rado,1991) that identifies NESB women as a (migrant) group with both special needs and problems as well as skills, talents and abilities. Unless these needs and problems are recognised and met, however, it is unlikely that NESB women can actualise their potential to their own satisfaction or to fulfil the requirements of Australian society.

It is especially worrying that a report on the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP, 1991), which is the largest English as a second language (ESL) program for NESB migrants in Australia, should have stated that 'a majority of AMEP clients are forced to exit the program at low levels of English proficiency'.(This was reported to one of the researchers by an official in DILGEA.) English has offical

language status in Australia. Any individual with inadequate English, including literacy, suffers disadvantage in many spheres of everyday life - social, economic and cultural (Hartley, 1989). There is a literature on women in migration in Australia which speaks of their distinctive 'double burden' (see, Martin,1991) in the host society, that of being 'woman' and being 'migrant'. To add language problems is a third challenge for NESB women in their struggle to become winners not losers.

(v) Literacy revived - essential life skill

Literacy (or the lack of it) for ESB and NESB Australians has become a national priority. This, at a time, when award restructuring has brought to the fore the potential for training and re-training opportunities to bring about an acceptance of the concepts of continuing and mass adult education. Such an impetus is unprecedented in Australia's post-war history. For example, a House of Representatives Standing Committee report (HR Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training,1991, p.1) has as its first recommendation that:

> ...the Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and Training, working in conjunction with the relevant State Ministers and the Australian Education Council, develop an adult literacy strategy as a matter of urgency;

Given the publicity during the 1990 International Literacy Year, that revealed the large numbers of adult Australians with inadequate levels of literacy, it is timely that such a recommendation should have been made. There is some disappointment that this HR report failed to target women's literacy as a matter of particular concern and priority and that it omitted to identify the issue of bi-literacy for NESB Australians as a matter worthy of further research and policy development.

THE STUDY

The research from which this paper has been drawn arose out of our professional experience. It triggered a concern that NESB women might not be receiving adequate help to extend or develop their English literacy, and perhaps also bi-literacy, skills. We felt that inadequacies could be due to two major factors. These are the failure to identify needs which, in turn, is likely to lead to insufficient or inappropriate provision.

In specific terms, the aim of the study was to enhance the understanding of opportunities for, and access to, further

education and/or paid employment for NESB women in urban and rural areas of Victoria. Work is one crucial way by which individuals contribute to and benefit from any society. It is central to the development of self-identity and plays and important role for those whose ethnic identity may be challenged as a consequence of their migration to, or location by reason of birth into, another culture. If there are barriers to participation in education and work, then the capacity of the individual to achieve her/his potential is severely limited. The costs of the particular handicap of illiteracy (and often also inadequate basic education skills) are manifest in areas such as social interaction, citizenship, leisure, family life, health, consumer rights, political activities as well as in labour force participation and status and their overtly economic consequences. For this reason, our focus included women in work, preparing for/interested in employment and those solely undertaking home duties or who had left paid work currently but for whom literacy was still an issue, even a goal, for purposes other than future employment.

Data were obtained by a multi-faceted methodology, including interviews, participant and non-participant observation, surveys and the review and analysis of an extensive formal and informal literature base. Our respondents included administrators, teachers, students, employers, personnel officers, union representatives and ethnic association representatives. We visited mainstream and community-based providers of English, literacy and basic education courses and workplaces. Extensive feedback on recommendations in the report was obtained from key informants who had a close involvement in this particular field of education.

In this paper, we report selectively on our findings. The focus is on NESB women and literacy in regard to the following aspects:

* Barriers to participation;

* Comparisons among NESB women located in rural and urban settings in various sub-groups, for example, in employment, seeking employment and currently occupied with home duties ; and

* Practical strategies and targets for overcoming major problems to access and participation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Barriers and Comparisons

The results indicated clearly that ESL classes whether offered by mainstream or community-based providers are over-

subscribed. These providers simply cannot satisfy the demand, let alone the need. Those who miss out are more likely to be women than men. Why is this so?

In documenting the access to ESL classes, and within that of literacy for NESB women, one must begin at their point of entry to Australia. If women are married (and a substantial proportion are), then they enter under the 'dependent' category. This means that they are not usually subject to the points test. Hence, their skills are not assessed and recorded and they do not receive labour market advice (Yeatman and Bradley, 1990). If they are interested in employment, they must find the necessary information without official help. In this, they are greatly helped by informal networks developed within their own communities. The question is whether this is always in their best interest. With respect to English classes, the information is probably easily available. In principle, during the first three years after arrival, NESB immigrants are eligible for free English tuition organised by mainstream providers such as AMES and TAFE. It must be remembered that originally the free tuition period was five years. Depending on the women's proficiency rating for English, they can join a lower level class at one of the AMES centres or a more advanced class offered by one of the TAFE colleges. This division between AMES and TAFE according to proficiency levels is becoming a more rigidly enforced policy.

Not all women eligible to join ESL classes, however, avail themselves of this opportunity. Their informal community network and their own inclination often direct them to community-based provisions. The agencies organising these include Neighbourhood Houses, Learning Centres, Municipal Libraries, Municipal Councils, Health Centres and Ethnic Associations. These are organisations well represented at this AAACE Conference. These providers strongly believe that particularly for beginning female ESL literacy learners of any age, they offer the most suitable courses (Literacy Needs of NESB Women Project Meeting 1990). This view is not necessarily shared by teachers in the mainstream sector.

We consistently followed up the question of dissemination of information to NESB migrants on ESL tuition including literacy. Our finding was that in both sectors, mainstream and community based, relatively little importance was attached to dissemination of information because the demand exceeded what could be offered (due to lack of funds). Great realiance also was placed on conventional strategies for dissemination of information, that is, the print media and word of mouth communication. In most cases, English was the only language used when advertising in the print media such as leaflets, brochures and entries in college handbooks. In the description of courses it was often not clear how these courses compared in language levels and how they connected with each other. In other words, were they

free standing units or were they component parts of a course or possible both? Pleasingly some AMES centres have started to set an example by showing with the help of a flowchart the educational pathways their classes formed and the vocational to non-vocational destinations they led to. A beginning has been made by some providers to use plain English and large print in advertising their courses. These are commendable moves but do not solve the problem of how to reach prospective learners with low or non-existent literacy skills in English by other means than the channel of communication they have not yet mastered. Course organisers and teachers are aware of this but don't consider it a problem becuase they have a second means of dissemination of information which is by word of mouth. Relying predominantly on these two methods of dissemination of information, providers are so successful in filling their classes that they constantly have to place applicants on waiting lists, or if not eligible for the particular course offered, are obliged to turn them away.

Apart from receiving less information on arrival than male immigrants, there are technical and economic obstacles such as transport and childcare to women joining classes. In the case of some groups, there are cultural norms as well that prevent women from leaving their homes to attend classes. It seems that the degree of success in reaching the majority of eligible women needing English tuition has a strong element of chance associated with it.

A major reason, therefore, why many NESB women <u>not in employment</u> do not attend literacy classes is the fact that they don't know about them or cannot find one that meets their needs. The next question is are women in employment or preparing for it better placed?

NESB women <u>in employment</u> are not an homogeneous group. They form sub-groups according to type of industry and manner of employment. For example, the distribution of women across industries is uneven. They are mostly found in what are called the 'pink-collar' industries (United Nations Newsletter, 1990) such as textiles, clothing and footwear, retail generally, food processing, hospitality, technology and clerical. These industries are less interested in subsidising the upskilling of their workforce, including English literacy tuition, than the male-dominated industries so that discrimination against women has already begun before eligibility of individual workers is being considered.

A further factor which disadvantages women is the changing nature of the pink-collar industries. The trend is towards capital concentration in a few big firms or sub-contractors. Big firms give priority to high value sophisticated products for which they need a highly skilled stable labour force.

It is in the interest of this industry to support skills development, including English literacy, of its registered and therefore 'visible' workers at all levels. In contrast, sub-contractors who specialise in cheap mass-produced products with a short marketing run need a numerically flexible, that is, casual labour force. This labour force consists mainly of women working at home, in other words outworkers, who are often not registered and therefore 'invisible'. Unlike the big firms, sub-contractors have no interest in upskilling their low-skilled workers who are easily replaceable, if not on-shore then off-shore. Because of this split, predominant in the female labour force, into visible or core workers and invisible or outworkers, we shall discuss the two groups separately.

(i) Core workers

Most enterprises which subsidise any form of English language tuition invite their employees to volunteer for such classes. NESB workers are expected to come forward on the basis of information they receive. The dissemination of this information is often handled quite casually. Workers are given printed sheets, only sometimes multilingually, or their supervisor or fellow worker informs them by word of mouth of what is available in English classes. Usually there is no mechanism in place to ensure that the information is correctly understood. Even if the information does reach the workers, their eligibility is often decided by their supervisor who may be prejudiced against the worker or who may find it inconvenient to release a worker at certain times. But even if informed and chosen, a worker might decline the offer in the belif that admitting difficulty with English literacy could affect job security.

Not all obstacles are workplace-related. Some arise from the women's own personal circumstances. If class times extend partly into after-hours, women with families of small children often do not attend because they cannot arrange childcare. Some women, in fact, delay taking paid work before their children reach school age because they are reluctant to leave them in the care of strangers. The provision of extended culture-specific childcare staffed by bilingual trained childcare personnel could remedy this situation (Clark, interview, 1990). For this to happen where required, government support is essential.

(ii) Outworkers

Informing core workers about opportunities to learn or upgrade their English literacy skills is relatively easy. In contrast, to reach outworkers is perhaps the most difficult. It probably requires a well organised campaign using a variety of advertising channels involving not only the media but also a plethora of organisations

(commonwealth, state and private), educational institutions, shops, supermarkets, libraries, health centres, neighbourhood houses and learning centres. The list is not complete. If these women are to take advantage of the tuition advertised, it must be free and the study period subsidised to compensate the women for the loss of working time; in other words, loss of income (see, Yeatman and Bradley, 1990). This is an area where public money could be legitimately spent.

It is generally believed that it is more difficult for rural NESB women to access educational services than for their counterparts living in the city. Obviously, the problems of childcare, transport and sufficient numbers to form classes of a viable size are magnified. A number of country centres we have contacted reported no English literacy provisions for NESB because of lack of demand.

For example, one adult literacy organiser in a country centre wrote the following on the survey form:

> We have a literacy program but we do not have many migrants in this neck of the woods. No need for a program for migrants. Don't have any migrants involved.

But we also had a number of responses reporting on a variety of activities. The responses came from: Apollo Bay, Beechworth, Colac, Geelong, Hamilton, Horsham, Kiewa Ovens Valley, Mildura, Mount Evelyn, Orbost, Swan Hill, Wangaratta, Wodonga and Yallourn. The mainstream sector was mostly represented by TAFE and the community sector by Learning and Health Centres. The community sector relied to some extent on voluntary unpaid tutors without post-secondary study and formal teaching qualifications. Undoubtedly, the educational provisions in the rural sector are more restricted than in the Melbourne metropolitan area but are they also inferior? Are rural NESB women losers by virtue of the quality of teaching they received? To answer this question, one needs to examine the barriers that exist to the full deployment of teacher expertise and to actually assess teaching effectiveness in situ; the latter was not possible in our study.

In summary, we found that barriers to access and participation in literacy and associated educative activities for NESB women arise both from personal and structural sources. These include life circumstances such as marital status and stage of family life cycle and ascribed characteristics such as age and ethnic origin, in the former, and 'processing' in the migration experience and insertion into the segmented labour market in Australia, in the latter. A crucial insight to flow from this is that literacy tuition cannot of itself transform all NESB women

into winners, even with regard solely to achieving functional levels of English literacy. In spite of this, there is much that can be done in education and training.

Targets and Strategies

Realistic targets towards which educational and employment authorities might aim include the following:

* Developing innovative modes of information dissemination;
* Upgrading delivery of services in the workplace;
* Putting a priority on in-service for teachers and volunteer tutors;
* Developing a range of courses tailored to meet diverse needs; and
* Exploiting the new technologies.

The final section of the paper will describe briefly some of the strategies identified as part of the research.

Dissemination

Some providers, particularly those specialising in catering for women, are not content to satisfy only overt demand. In their commitment to social justice they want to satisfy need not only demand. In order to do so, they contact NESB women by means of door knocking. This has proved an effective but time-consuming technique. A more economical variant of it is to find a well respected woman in a particular vicinity, get her interested and organise a social meeting in her home. In the course of this activity, the idea of attending literacy classes can be raised, discussed and potential participants can be recruited.

The degree of success in reaching the majority of eligible women needing English tuition has a strong element of chance associated with it. A more powerful strategy is to link the advertisement of such classes with participation in decision-making. The Women's Ethnic Network of Victoria (WEN, 1990) has developed an access and equity model which could be used for such purposes. It is of presented here in summary form.

Access and Equity Model : Outline (Based on Women's ethnic network, 1990. pp.2-6)

* Set up steering committee;
* Identify the theoretical and practical aspects of the task;
* Choose the location;
* Locate the ethno-specific groups to be involved;
* Make preliminary contact with NESB women workers;
* Solve problems encountered;
* Establish contact with target groups;
* Consult target groups for choice of options for action;
* Arrange information days;
* Form a cross-cultural group with representatives from each women's group to accomplish one of the chosen options;
* Arrange meetings and seminars for bilingual workers.

Clearly the model can be easily modified for forming ethno-specific groups where this is desirable. The project (WEN, 1990, p.7) summarises the consultation task as follows:

1. Locate and consult with key workers;
2. Locate and consult with bilingual workers;
3. Locate and consult with ethno-specific women's groups;
4. Collate findings;
5. Establish a list of options and ascertain their feasibility;
6. Present options to groups and re-consult; and
7. Plan strategies according to feedback.

The model and the accompanying task specifications are of interest because they extend the efforts of casually connecting NESB women to a well planned series of meetings involving various groups of women. This strategy has the potential of obtaining the commitment of a greater number of women. The project also draws attention to the role bilingual workers can play and the need for training these workers and providing them with continuous support. If applied to researching the women's interest in literacy, it can help to identify the specific literacy skills they wish to acquire. The literacy courses they might be interested in could range from those with a focus on reading and writing skills with or without oracy development, through courses with a specific vocational or personal interest focus and an incidental literacy acquisition agenda such as developing skills in word processing or folk art (see, Foster and Rado, 1991, pp.96-99).

In fact, already existing specific interest groups such as cake decoration could be systematically visited by bilingual workers with the purpose of recruiting them for literacy

classes or adding a literacy component to their group activity. Such groups are often hosted by city councils and community/ethnic organisations such as Tenants' Associations and the Ecumenical Migration Centre so that they are not too difficult to contact.

Other places where NESB women can be found are hospital waiting rooms. AMES staff are already exploiting this situation by teaching them English connected with childbirth. Although these individualised teaching sessions are irregular and unpredictable because they depend on chance encounters, they nevertheless serve a purpose to some extent in giving the NESB women useful information. The technique of contacting women in hospitals could be extended to NESB women generally who are seeking medical help. While they are waiting, they could be given information about English literacy tuition preferably in their mother tongue on the assumption that some of them despite their health problems would be well enough to attend such classes. This type of dissemination strategy requires the services of bilingual workers.

The strategies discussed so far put the provider/researcher in the position of initiating contact with prospective women learners. We know of at least one strategy of information dissemination which does the opposite. It puts the NESB women into the position of initiator. For the price of a local call, any woman anywhere in Victoria can contact the Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE) funded by the Department of Community Services Victoria. This telephone information service operates in several community languages: English, Greek, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese. It gives information on a wide range of subjects of interest to women such as pensions, health services and self-help groups. This is another example where bilingual workers are needed.

Identifying strategies of dissemination is one thing, identifying the information to be given is another. For this the mainstream and community-based providers need to meet and decide as a group what clientele to attract for the various courses they intend to offer. For this to be done efficiently, an 'ethnographic' map of NESB women in Victoria is needed. Such a map should show the concentration of language groups according to age, educational background, vocation and socio-economic status of the family. This would give some indication whether the women are eligibile for mainstream provider courses and, if they are, whether such courses provide the best learning environment for them. The mainstream provider courses tend to be highly professional and so serve women with clearly defined aspirations. Such courses must be preserved intact. At the same time, means have to be found to strengthen the community-based sector which is interested to look after

women with particular characteristics. These are the NESB women who do not satisfy the free tuition eligibility guidlelines. They are excluded because of length of residence and age or have exhausted the range of courses available to them, who lack self-confidence to contact mainstream providers or travel distances, who look for bilingual support, who are afraid to expose their illiteracy in their mother-tongue.

Workplace Initiatives

To remove obstacles to receiving English tuition that may exist in the workplace is a matter for the individual enterprise to resolve. We have identified two promising strategies. One is the use of educational counsellors, a scheme being developed by AMES (Economou and Masters, 1989). Such counsellors are well placed to allay fears of failure and job security and assist in the formation of appropriate classes.

The other scheme is similar to some of the dissemination strategies used with women not in the workforce. The model in question was developed to give education information about health. It can easily be adapted to educational information about literacy. The project, Women in Industry: Contraception and Health (WICH), developed by a migrant women's organisation has adopted the following technique. The organisation obtains permission for its multilingual staff to visit an enterprise several times. In the canteen during meal breaks, they talk to the women in their own language and in English inividually and in groups giving them information on health. They distribute multilingual materials, use visual aids and invite discussion. Instead of discussing health, a task force could be set up collectively by the female-dominated industries with the purpose of stimulating interest in the acquisition of English literacy. This could be done under the auspices of a Victorian government department such as the Division of Further Education(DFE) or the State Training Board(STB).

Effective Teaching

Factors which contribute to effective teaching are:

* career paths for full-time and part-time staff;
* career paths for sessional staff;
* teacher training;
* regular in-servicing;
* teaching resources; and
* time allocated for - attending inservice sessions, preparing lessons, collecting resources.

These factors were derived from an analysis of the survey responses and interview protocols of literacy tuition organisers and teachers.

The majority of ESL and literacy teachers are women. This puts them in a good position to relate to their female students. Nevertheless, as they are likely to have family commitments, they may need special support for further study in a dynamic teaching subject. They often come to literacy teaching with heterogeneous qualifications and would benefit from specific training in teaching adults. For many teachers, there is no clear career structure which acts as an incentive to upgrade qualifications. In this respect, full-time AMES and TAFE teachers are in the best and sessional and volunteer teachers in the worst position. One can add that teachers in rural areas are more likely to be less well trained, as they are often part-time, sessional or unpaid volunteer staff.

Some AMES and TAFE teachers have expressed high satisfaction with the in-servicing available to them. The majority of teachers, however, consistently deplored the lack of such provisions and/or the lack of necessary arrangements for attendance. This was particularly stressed by teachers in rural areas.

(i) Comments from community-based teachers:

* As many teachers are sessional, there are problems of being able to attend conferences etc.

* Within regions, practising tutors could take part in workshops sharing program ideas, courses and resources; 1/2 day more suitable than whole day functions

(ii) Comments from mainstream-based teachers:

* We have access to a reasonable amount of in-service training but I find it difficult to organise time as it is often awkward to arrange 'emergency' teachers to cover community classes.

* AMES staff to visit country, support isolated teachers.

* Continued or increased in-services with the providers of women's courses

* Practical workshops

(iii) Comments from rural-based teachers

* Teacher development is only available

outside the college as ESL is a specialised area and there are only two staff employed. In-services attended in 1989 were good (conferences, workshops in Melbourne)

* Professional training for Home Tutors needed

* Needed country workshops and in-service

Teachers also commented on resources and time allocation.

(iv) Comment from community-based teachers:

* Australian materials needed

(v) Comments from mainstream-based teachers:

* A wider range of resource materials would be nice

* limited resources

(vi) Comments from rural-based teachers:

* Materials have to be simplified for lower levels.Some books have too much English of American bias. Some boring.

* Funded trips to Resource Centres

* There is never enough tinme for teachers to get together to discuss issues of concern of professional development.

* Problem of preparation time, not enough allowed/paid for.

* Lack of time to develop courses using outside resources.

* Not enough time to explore resources

* Not enough time to gather materials

* Lack of time to fully develop teaching materials as I am employed as a teacher and have to teach the required number of hours every week. Coordination of the program has to be done whenever I have 'spare time' and also building up resources.

Although it cannot be said that rural-based teachers feel hampered in offering their students the best courses they are capable of planning and delivering, the sense of frustration expressed seemed stronger than for teachers in the metropolitan area.

Because dissemination of information in rural areas is more difficult, it seems to receive more attention from provider staff. The range of strategies mentioned include the use of all manner of local centres including religious organisations. Perhaps one of the most effective methods of making and maintaining contact with rural NESB women is the provision of a place where they can drop in, are made welcome, get information and counselling services. The Geelong Ethnic Communities Council(ECC) and Geelong Migrant Resource Centre(MRC) have established an International Women's Club which partly serves this purpose. The Mildura and District Education Council also has a Multicultural Women's Association and Drop-In Centre.

Diverse Courses

Although, as we have shown, access to literacy courses for NESB women is often difficult or even impossible, teachers have a remarkable insight into what types of courses are needed. Aptly one of them expressed the

> concern that literacy provision is not just to be seen at the bottom level - because what happens is that if it is only wanted at the bottom level- they may just get past these bottom rungs and then it stops. They are stuck in limbo between no longer needing subsistence language and can't have enough for further education- extending literacy to all levels- a progressive approach.

It seems particularly at the 'bottom level', women need a personal, whereas men are happier with a directly skills-oriented, approach. This implies that beginner groups should be gender specific or alternatively that for a selected number of sessions, women and men should be timetabled separately.

According to our respondents, women's literacy courses must include topics and activities associated with the women's immediate as well as future needs. There is great and legitimate concern among all teachers for those who no longer qualify for mainstream tuition, namely the longer residents and those of retiring age. One must, however, be wary of not generalising their needs to other groups. The gender specific course components mentioned by the teachers include : raising self-confidence/esteem, becoming a more independent person, dealing with health issues, parenting, practising cultural adjustment skills, discussing family relationships, asserting oneself, managing stress and expressing feelings. Health and self-confidence were the most frequently mentioned components. Only one respondent

pointed out that the women in one of his groups wanted to study literature because this added a 'spiritual' component. One of the mainstream-based teachers summarised the characteristics of female and male learners in point form as follows:

* Women feel much happier discussing some issues without men. In fact, some won't open up with men present.

* Men tend to dominate discussions and demand more attention in class.

* Women feel more confident, learn more, with other women.

Her recommendations were :

* Women only classes should exist particularly for initial access programs and in new technology and non-traditional learning areas.

* Women students need opportunity to negotiate and control learning and have a say in their curriculum.

* Bi-lingual and bi-cultural teachers/advisers should be encouraged in all women's classes.

This last recommendation leads to the learners themselves, namely the various possibilities of exploiting their existing knowledge and skills. For example, if they share the same mother tongue, they can help each other in elucidating meaning and solving problems. This we observed on numerous occasions in the course of our classroom observations. It is our contention that human beings are natural teachers, an ability we need to utilise in adult literacy development.

If the description given by our respondent of low-level women learners is correct, then the claim of community providers asserting that they are particularly suited to teach beginners can have some credence attached to it. Funding of mainstream providers is often subject to teaching language skills directly and not as a vehicle to deal with other matters. It seems that community providers might have greater freedom to accommodate their female students' personal needs with regard to the subject matter taught. This gives them a definite advantage.

New Technologies

The resources teachers referred to as accessible or desirable were mainly conventional teaching aids. The items

most frequently mentioned were print materials, particularly course books, which on the whole were judged unsuitable for Australian conditions. Besides these, the list of resources included newspaper and magazine articles, brochures (bilingual), photocopied materials, maps, pictures, photos, illustrations, posters, cassette tapes, card games, objects and students' work. None of the rural teachers mentioned the new technologies. Only one city teacher used the term as cited below. Others sporadically listed the computer or video as an available resource.

It can be said that the new technologies are not generally accessible to adult literacy teachers and there is no overt demand for such resources. This may be due to teachers' unfamiliarity with the positive contribution the new technologies could make to literacy tuition particularly in rural areas where geographical distance is often a problem. Many city and country teachers regard media-assisted instruction with suspicion because it cannot provide the necessary social context. It is not appreciated that it can nevertheless be used, if not in an interpersonal, at least in an interactive way. Another serious barrier to its use is the present high cost. Consequently in adult education the necessary equipment is normally only available in the language centres of some mainstrean providers.

Media-aided instruction is used, however, as a means of delivering education to school-aged children in rural areas. The audiographic technology or telematics the Victorian Ministry of Education uses for this purpose typically consists of a computer, facsimile and DUCT audioterminal. The latter is the acronym for Diverse Use for Communications Technology system which allows several people in several locations to talk to each other (D'Cruz, 1990, p.8). One of the barriers preventing the extensive use of telematics or more sophisticated versions of the system is the high cost. As D'Cruz suggests, a flexible multi-purpose communications system would lower the cost. Such a system could serve, for example, junior, senior and adult learners as well as business firms and other organisaions.

We must stress that we are not advocating the replacement of teachers by the new technologies. We are pleading for judicious use of them as teaching aids. We are aware that this requires, as a first step, the development of suitable materials for this type of instructional delivery mode. We suggest, however, that this is an area that should receive the urgent attention of relevant funding bodies.

In summary, there was a remarkable consensus among respondents from all categories associated with literacy education that the demand for literacy classes generated by NESB women cannot be met under present provisions and that most of the barriers to access and participation are well

known. Teachers and women themselves could articulate the wide range of literacy needs including nature and level of literacy required, types of courses preferred and outcomes sought. Respondents in workplace settings (especially employers and their representatives) exhibited less certainty in their knowledge of demand and need and gave varying levels of support to their satisfaction. Our findings demonstrate the importance of probing the complexity of the issue and of clearly identifying sub-groups within major categories of NESB women in and not in paid work. Without such identification, feasible goals and targeted strategies for overcoming barriers and including all the sub-groups could not be developed. It was heartening to uncover the extent of innovative ideas and current, as well as potential, practices for literacy education amongst our respondents and their organisations.

CONCLUSION

A clear message emerging from this exploratory study was that the concept of winners and losers must not be taken too literally or too narrowly. For example, it may well be true that many married NESB women not in paid work have unfulfilled literacy needs and in one sense could be termed losers. It may also be true that careful and creative planning could be carried out, with adequate resources, to improve the record. By the same token, many of those women have a very important role at this life stage in socialising their children and preserving the first language and culture within the family; this can hardly be described as 'losing'. Similarly, a case could be made that it is Australian society generally that is the loser if the talents of NESB women are not developed and the (Australian) state is a decided winner if NESB women's efforts result in healthy, well-adjusted children and stable families.

Having said that, we consider that this research, even with the restricted focus discussed here, raises a number of very serious issues. We shall sum them up briefly as follows:

* The philosophy underlying 'multicultural' Australia, and in particular of the national languages policy, risks exposure as little more than a political slogan if NESB women's literacy and general educational needs are not given priority.

* The peculiar salience of the literacy and skills training nexus in the 1990s cannot be viewed as a problem that can be solved by the simple formula - 'more of the same' (classes, resources,goals etc.) without taking into account the complexity of:

    language and literacy (content and methodology),
    the clientele to be accommodated, and
    the position and status of women in Australian society.

* Assumptions about NESB women as primarily 'victims' are severely limited and may transform some NESB women from winners to losers while, paradoxically, enabling others to move from being losers to being winners.

Perhaps the paradoxical elements inherent in the question we posed for this paper find an echo in the warning cited by Moore (1991, p.45):

> ...everything is a displacement of something else. I think it is probably true that all knowledge is a displacement from something, but I think there are degrees. I think that certainly the most malignant is the kind that's doing the displacement while denying it most strongly.

For example, if governments pay lip service to the importance of satisfying NESB women's literacy needs, yet, at the same time, fail to address underlying structural problems such as segmented labour markets, lack of culturally sensitive childcare or inadequate provision of lieracy classes, then they can be judged guilty of actually denying women their expected rights.

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